

report, and to substitute the words of the old Constitution as follows:

"The legislature shall consist of two distinct branches, a Senate and a House of Delegates, which shall be styled the General Assembly of Maryland."

The question was taken, and the amendment was agreed to.

The second section of the report of the committee, was then read as follows:

Section 2nd. The senators shall be elected by the qualified voters, for the term of four years, and the Delegates for the term of _____ from the day of the general election."

Mr. PHELPS moved to strike out the said second section, and substitute for it an amendment, of which he had given notice on Saturday last, and which was in the following words:

"The senators shall be elected by the qualified voters of this State, for the term of four years, and the delegates in like manner, for the term of two years from the day of the general election; and the regular session of the General Assembly shall be biennial."

Mr. MERRICK remarked that a motion to perfect a section was in order, before the motion to strike it out. He would, therefore, move to fill the blank in the section with "one."

This proposition, (Mr. M. remarked,) brought up the question of biennial or annual sessions. His own opinion accorded with the views entertained by our ancestors, which was, that it was wise and wholesome—a great preservative of liberty and of the rights of the people, that there should be frequent meetings of their representatives. He did not like the idea of leaving the whole affairs of the State of Maryland—its financial concerns and general interests—in the hands of individuals—public officers—for the period of two years, before the grand judgment of the State should be called to examine and pass upon their acts. He thought the public good required that the Legislature should meet once a year—that the representatives of the people should be elected at short intervals, and should account to their principals for the manner in which they had used their powers. This was a great cardinal principle, which lay at the foundation of all free government. He hoped that this Convention would not set the example of violating that principle. Let the length of the sessions be limited, if the Convention chose, to as short a period as they might think proper. But there was no other way in which the people could get at the doings of their functionaries, except through their representatives. This Convention had met to form a Constitution to last for years, until it should be found unsuited to the times. The Convention, therefore, should look now to the dangers which might threaten the State. One of these dangers was, the unfaithfulness of public servants. God forbid that he should reflect upon any man. But gentlemen were to consider the large sums of money which were passing through the hands of these officers, and should remember that the best and purest men, *had* been tempted and corrupted.

These public trusts, therefore, should not be left unaccounted for, for the period of two years. Let the officers of the State feel and know that they were annually responsible for their acts. It would be a great check upon them—a safeguard for themselves, and for the people. He hoped, therefore, that there would be annual elections, and annual convocations of the Legislature. So far as the matter of economy was concerned, it was not to be weighed in the balance, against the great good to be attained.

Mr. PHELPS said, he felt constrained to acknowledge that he felt he occupied a most unenviable position, in regard to this report. The honorable chairman of the committee, (Mr. Johnson,) is not now in his seat, and through the courtesy of that distinguished gentleman, in connection with the position assigned him, upon the committee itself, he felt called upon to exercise at least, some supervisory care over this report.

He regretted to differ with his friend from Charles, (Mr. Merrick.) He always entertained the most profound respect for his opinions. His long and brilliant public services, entitled him to regard, but he could not vote for his amendment. It was suggested to him, (Mr. P.,) upon his right, that his object would be attained, by moving to fill the blank, in the second section of the bill, with two years. He thanked the gentleman for his kindness, but must adhere to his original motion.

He desired, by his amendment, to approach his object, boldly and without cover. The majority of the committee were in favor of biennial sessions of the Legislature, and the report now under consideration, was designed to accomplish that object; yet, without this amendment, or some other similar to it, the report would fail to secure this most important proposition. Important in his estimation, in every sense, and one in which the commonwealth must feel the deepest interest.

The gentleman from Charles (Mr. Merrick,) had insisted upon frequent elections, and upon frequent, and direct accountability to the people. That the representative should be forced, at short periods, to give an account of his stewardship to the people themselves. Now, Mr. President, I fully concur in these opinions. They are in strict accordance with the spirit and genius of our Republican institutions. The very principle contended for is already engrafted upon our Bill of Rights, and is destined to become a part and parcel of the organic law of our land. Frequent elections and frequent and direct accountability (Mr. P.) said, were doctrines which he held in common with his friend from Charles. But what are we to understand by these words "these cardinal principle?" These are relative terms, and are surely not intended to designate any precise length of time. These terms, if imperative, should apply alike to all the officers of the Government. All alike should be held to direct and strict accountability. Yet, Mr. President, we now have reports before the Convention providing for the election of Governor for the term of three years, Registers of Wills, and Clerks of the County courts for six years, and the Judges